

Adoption Success/ Disruption Literature Search Summary
Program Enhancement Plan Adoption Sub-Committee
June 2005

- ❖ The information is summarized from Field Guide to Child Welfare, Volume IV Placement and Permanence and a comprehensive research article from the Casey Family Program entitled “Placement Disruption in Family Foster Care” as primary sources. The latter cited multiple other studies. Additional information was included from current literature/research throughout. Items are listed randomly. An attempt was made to keep duplication at a minimum. Starred (*) items were cited multiple times.
- ❖ There were considerable references that characteristics of successful foster and adoptive families are shared

Important Tenets

- *The key to “success” is a function of interactions between child and parent variables, facilitated by key worker/ agency/ program factors. Parent characteristics cannot be considered in isolation from child, worker and agency factors.
- *A fundamental limitation of studies examining variables of successful foster placements is the lack of agreement about the definition of “success” itself.
- *The need for careful child and family matching and developing strategies for enhancing supportive behaviors for foster/adoptive parents

Strengths Noted about Mothers:

- Self-disciplined, mature
- Calm, emotionally stable, healthy degree of emotional detachment
- Able to face reality
- Enthusiastic (motivated)
- *Logical (vs. feeling based) decisions;

Strengths Noted about Fathers:

- Flexible, creative
- Conservative
- Hard to fool; distrustful, skeptical
- Sensitive; concerned about child’s needs vs. own
- Self-sufficient
- Positive attitude toward social workers

Agency Strength Characteristics
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- The availability of adoption subsidy and services
- *Pre-training and support available (groups, buddy family and agency)
- Respite care
- *Adequate staffing to allow staff to provide support to families
- Ongoing staff in-services
- Nuanced understanding of relationship between parent characteristics, experiences, decision-making and selective matching of children.
- Appropriate screening, home study, matching, case planning and support services
- Sibling issues specifically addressed : (friction between adoptive child and bio child; who will be displaced in terms of bedrooms, power influence, attention, etc)
- Expand and target recruitment efforts to include a variety of helping professions
- Trust and mutual respect between families and agency.

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Agency Liability Factors

- The child welfare system is fragmented with little collaboration.
- Lack of oversight and multiple caseworkers/ turnovers
- Delays between referral and actual placement
- Insufficient or rushed assessments; poor matching

Social Worker Strength Characteristics:
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(This was the least studied but recognized as an important factors)

- High degree of contact; Expend greater energy
- Good rapport
- Honest with child
- Competent, well trained/educated

Strengths in Families

- *Adaptability, ability to individualize child(ren) needs and respond accordingly
- Ability to “depersonalize” parenting when problems occur
- Creative discipline; innovative child management techniques
- Accepting, authoritative, and discipline using non-power assertive strategies
- Sense of humor and self care
- “Balanced personality profile pattern” (between extroversion, anxiety, tough poise and independence- 43% foster parents vs. 13% of general population exhibited this)
- Couple similarities were greater (fathers more conservative and creative, mothers more “self disciplined”)
- Used reason rather than force to accomplish something with the child
- *High ability to cope with challenging behaviors without harsh discipline
- *High tolerance for behaviors that contradict their personal values/beliefs etc
- Tolerance for own ambivalence and/or strong negative feelings
- Parenting is seen as important “life’s” work
- Recognize the potential effects on their bio children and have a plan to deal with these effects.
- *Positive attitude and willingness to work with social worker/ agency
- Ability to delay gratification; refusal to be rejected by the child
- Ability to find happiness in small ways
- *Flexibility in parental roles/ expectations; easy going
- Systems view of their family; Open vs. closed family system
- Caringly intrusive and controlling
- *Separates own needs from child’s needs
- Do not blame or scapegoat child for child’s problem
- Proactive vs. passive
- Non-defensive; ask for help from agency
- Physically able to care for child; no disability or health issues (of parent)
- Honest with the child and agency
- Enough time for care, supervision and parenting; availability
- Provide opportunities for spiritual development without forcing the issue

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- More than one foster child in the home
- Acceptance of: poor academic performance, lack of religious observance
- *Pre-service and on-going training participation
- High quality physical and socio-emotional climate in the home
- Provide a safe and secure environment
- Foster parent conversion are highly successful
- Promote educational, social and emotional development
- *Foster cultural/intellectual development in child
- Meet physical and mental health care needs
- *Value diversity and support children's cultural needs
- Connect children to safe, nurturing relationships intended to last a life time
- Manage ambiguity and loss for the foster child and family
- *Grow as a foster/ adoptive parent - skill development and role clarification
- Manage the demands of fostering on personal and familial well-being
- Support relationships between children and their families
- Work as a member of a professional team - working in partnership; cooperation
- Deep concern/ love for children; empathetic
- Strong faith/church support
- Few psychosocial problems
- *More resources (community, agency, personal attributes, financial)
- European-Americans who work in a helping profession are more willing to foster children with emotional or behavioral problems
- Willingness and ability to foster handicapped or seriously ill children, children with serious behavioral or emotional problems, sexually abused children, teenagers
- *Good parenting knowledge, skills and experience with children
- *Ability to meet personal needs
- *Feeling supported by workers and others involved in the child and family's life
- *Stability (home, personal life, patience, *marriage, *finances)
- Family encouragement and support
- *Activities and friendships outside of the home which can provide support and an outlet for emotions.
- *Demonstrate trust, love, honesty and nurturance
- History of handling difficult adjustments and stress successfully
- Ability to function as individuals as well as a family unit
- Able to function at a job
- *Strong family and community relationships and supports

Strengths specific to Adoptive Homes, in addition to above factors:
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parental entitlement (belief in their right and responsibility to act in ways that promote the child's best interests)• "Hands on" parenting (doing things <i>with</i> the child vs. talking to them; modeling; positive reinforcement)• Life long commitment |
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Strengths of Child

- *Ability to attach
- *Placement at a young age
- *Strong sense of belonging and integration into foster/adoptive family

Risk Factors of Foster Parents

- *Most frequently cited reason was family expectations as related to problems in coping with the child's challenges
- The first eighteen months after the placement (the average time to disruption)
- Applicants who were first or only children and/or had little experience with children.
- *Foster fathers with highly formal religious backgrounds, whose own fathers were not affectionate as parents
- Pairing children with "difficult temperaments" with "inflexible parents"
- *Foster mothers' *expectations* that their child exhibit less negative mood and behaviors.
- *Younger mother (< 46)
- One or three or more birth children
- No other foster children
- *Poor motivation (playmate for birth child)
- Overly similar parents / Extremely high similarities in the couple (rigidity)
- *Father negative toward social worker
- *Unmet needs in: day care, recreational activities for foster/ adoptive children, health care costs not covered by Medicaid, transportation for medical appointments, and respite care
- *Stressors: dealing with issues of attachment and reunification; adjusting to fostering with little time to prepare; dealing with the emotional, physical, or behavioral problems of the foster child; dealing with the "System"
- Strained relations among family members; having poor discipline strategies
- Poor communication with workers, lack of say in foster children's future
- Higher disruptions seen in the adoptions of girls adopted by non-fostering parents
- Physical, psychological, emotional or cognitive disability (of the parent)
- History of dysfunctional abusive birth or adoptive family relationships and strained peer interaction
- Little insight into their own parenting strengths or vulnerabilities
- Adopted child displaces a biological child as the oldest in the family
- Families with higher education levels and higher incomes have higher disruption rates, possibly related to higher academic and social expectations.
- *Lack of adequate post-adoption services readily available
- Documented/strong suspicion of physical / sexual abuse or neglect against a child
- Current or former abuse of drugs or alcohol
- Current or former significant mental health disorder
- History of arrest or felony conviction
- History or domestic abuse, spousal abuse, either as a victim or perpetrator
- Significant personal issues related to childhood victimization from CAN
- Significant problems parenting their biological children

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- Significant interpersonal problems, chronic conflict, poor work history
- *A closed family system with no supports or outlet other than each other.
- Difficulty expressing emotions and feelings appropriately
- History of unsuccessful handling of adjustments and stress.
- *Rigid rules and expectations; intolerance for different lifestyles
- Marital /financial instability, substantially in debt
- Health concerns that could impact the care of a child

Risk Factors of Children

- *Frequency and severity of maladaptive behaviors
- *A “bad” influence on other child(ren); marring the family’s reputation
- Asocial (socially offensive, uncooperative)
- Internally maladaptive (hurtful to self, withdrawn)
- *Externally maladaptive (hurtful to others, destructive, disruptive); endanger the health or safety of family’s other child(ren)
- Poor attachment to parents, teachers, caseworkers
- Chronically neglectful and abusive birth parents
- Older child, male, non-Hispanic, African-American
- Grief process is incomplete.
- Previous disruption
- *Child exhibits sexual acting out, physical aggression, stealing, vandalism, defiance, and suicide attempts
- Child(ren) placed with one or more biological or adoptive children

Risk Characteristics of Social Worker
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- Minimal energy expended
- *High turnover
- Lack of rapport with family

Summary completed by Wendy Krueger, Tammy Karlen, Barb Roznowski -June 20, 2005